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ABSTRACT

A "dynamic priority" theory of Chinese second language instruction is outlined and discussed. The theory focuses on five aspects of language instruction: spoken vs. written language; universality vs. particularity; cultural vs. linguistic tasks; performance vs. competence; and proficiency vs. achievement. A dynamic relationship is seen between the two components of each aspect, with instructional priority, in terms of both sequence and amount of time devoted, assigned to one component over the other. "Dynamic" suggests that the component receiving priority varies in different stages of learning. In early instruction, priority is given to spoken Chinese, with written language receiving attention later. Universality (common formal features shared by all languages) has priority over particularity (features unique to Chinese) in all stages of instruction. Linguistic tasks have priority over cultural tasks in early stages of instruction, with cultural tasks taking precedence at the advanced level. Performance (language use) is prominent on the instructional agenda from the first day, with competence (knowledge of language structure) taking a lesser role. Finally, proficiency (communication skills in the context of testing) is to be of higher priority than achievement in testing. Implications of these principles for curriculum design, teaching method, material selection, and testing procedures are examined. (MSE)

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Towards a Theory of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Weiping Wu

Center for Applied Linguistics

(ACTFL/CLTA Annual Meeting, 1993. San Antonio, TX)

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TOWARDS A THEORY OF TEACHING CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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I. Introduction

Is the field of teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) guided by any theory? Do we have anything to offer new comers who would like to know some basics in this field? Are we still doing the same thing in teaching Chinese as we did in the fifties or even earlier, even though time has changed?

Based on teaching experience in Chinese programs at the university as well as language schools for training government personnel, five aspects, each containing two components, have been identified as the key issues in teaching CFL. These issues also reflect the resounding themes encountered in this field:

(1) Spoken versus written language;

(2) Universality versus particularity;

(3) Cultural versus linguistic tasks;

(4) Performance versus competence;

(5) Proficiency versus achievement.

These are the five aspects of a dynamic priority theory in teaching CFL, proposed in this paper. The focus of the theory is the relation between the two somewhat contrastive components in each aspect. Teachers may not (and perhaps never will) agree on how these issues should be handled, but they will certainly agree

that different ways of dealing with these basic issues will affect the outcome of teaching. In other words, these are issues that we cannot afford to ignore if we are serious about teaching Chinese.

Key words used in this paper, like dynamic, priority, spoken, written, universality, particularity, performance, competence, proficiency, achievement, cultural, linguistic, will be defined and expounded, if distinction is called for, in the course of the discussion.

I'll first discuss each of the five aspects in this theoretical framework, explaining the relation between the two components within each aspect, what I mean by dynamic priority, and why priority should be given to one component and not the other within the pair. Knowing the complexity of all the issues involved, I intend only to provide a summary of principles and clarifications of some fundamental issues. Each aspect in itself will have many problems that should be investigated. For a more detailed account on some of the aspects, see discussions on the relation between spoken and written Chinese (Wu, 1990), between universality and particularity in Chinese teaching (Wu, 1993), the rational and methodology for proficiency based teaching and testing (Jiang, 1993), and the importance as well as specific steps in implementing culture in language teaching (Pan, 1993).

After all the key issues in the framework are explained, I will touch upon some of the implications for teaching CFL within this theoretical framework in terms of time allocation, materials

to be used, teaching methodology and testing procedure. An experimental model employed in a language school training government personnel will be used to illustrate my point.

II. Aspects of the theory

Priority as used in this paper means two things. One is the sequence of time. If A has priority over B, that means A will be dealt with before B. The other is the amount of time. That means the time allocated for a task with priority will be more than the one without. Contextual clues will make it clear which of the two meanings, or both of them, it is used for.

Dynamic suggests that the task receiving priority varies in different stages in the learning process. That is, a priority task in stage one may not be so in stage two and vice versa. No matter which stage we are in, however, there is only one task designated as the priority task. In terms of time, dynamic indicates that the division of time among different tasks is not fixed. A priority task always receives more time than any other individual task. The main objective of a dynamic priority in teaching is to make sure that time and efforts are guaranteed for the most important task of learning a language at a particular acquisition stage. At any given time, it is inevitable that other tasks also exist and should receive due attention.

Two points should be borne in mind throughout the discussion. First, in learning a language, one cannot acquire all the skills at the same time. It is true that language is a system with various

interrelated subsystems and should be treated as a whole. The nature of learning, however, makes it possible to focus on individual components of a language at a given stage. It is not difficult to accept that language learning is often divided into stages, that language learning also consists of different tasks, and that, in order to achieve best result within a given time, certain components have to be given priority at each developmental stage (Alatis, 1990).

Secondly, by describing these five aspects in paired terms, it does not imply that they are mutually exclusive. The focus of attention here is the allocation of time and effort in dealing with various tasks in language learning. If we draw a line to connect the two terms, at any given point on the line, elements of both (e.g. universality or and particularity) can be found. It is a matter of proportion, rather than presence versus absence.

Spoken Chinese and written Chinese

At the beginning stage (the length of which will depend on the length of the whole program), spoken Chinese has priority over written Chinese. Spoken Chinese is defined as the oral form of the language as it said and heard, regardless of the romanization systems (e.g. Pinyin, Yale, or BPMF) by which it is represented. Written Chinese refers to characters, both simplified and traditional (Jiang, 1984; Li and Thompson, 1982).

By giving priority to spoken Chinese, I mean the students will devote all their time and efforts in their study until they can

perform elementary tasks (asking for direction, describing an event, asking questions, etc.). During this stage, the task facing the student will be similar to the one facing students of a language considered as close to English, like Spanish.

According to Clifford (Clifford, 1993), the more sameness there is between the native language of the learners and the target language being learned, the easier it is for them to learn. It is also based on this understanding that the government language schools list Chinese (with Arabic and Korean) as the most difficult languages, and Spanish as the easiest for speakers of English (Garza, 1993).

Obviously, any serious students of Chinese will have to learn characters eventually. Once a working knowledge of the spoken form is within the reach of the students, however, the task of studying the characters becomes less frightening (Wu, 1990). The only connection to make then will be he one between meaning and symbols. Since the time needed for the learner t acquire such a skill (not just knowledge) differs from program to program, the time for introducing characters will also be different.

Quite a few arguments have been heard against such an approach. Among the common ones are: If characters have to be learned, it is better to start early. Or, students are confused by all the allophones without characters. While these are certainly valid arguments, it should be remembered that we are not saying characters should be put aside altogether. They are just put aside at the first stage of learning, during which the problem

of allophones is not yet so serious. I will comment on the first argument after explaining why priority should be given to spoken Chinese.

From a linguistic point of view, to give priority to spoken Chinese is determined by the nature of language. In spoken Chinese, there are 416 basic syllables. Counting the tones, the total number will be 1,295 (excluding 39 light tones) (Chao, 1968). The number of characters, on the other hand, is quite impressive. *Kangxi* Dictionary has about 47,000 characters (though many of them are now obsolete). *Cihai*, an authoritative table top dictionary has 15,000 characters. To function as a literate person, one has to know more than 3,000 characters, which will take several years of continuous study (Norman, 1989; Ann, 1982). A 6-credit course (one semester) at Georgetown introduces approximately 175 characters. Programs at different programs may vary, but the range is between 100 to 300. Even at the higher end of it, it will take about 5 years to reach the 3,000 goal, if we pretend that every character learned is remembered.

If we introduce characters from the very beginning, most the time during the first two years, which is usually the length of time for most students who are not majoring in Chinese at the university level, will be spent on fighting with the characters. The total number of characters they will have learned at the end of the two years, however, comes to about only one third of what is needed to read newspapers. We don't want the students to spent two years and still cannot talk nor read (Wu, 1992).

Universality versus particularity

On the strategic level, universality has priority over particularity in the course of the whole program. Universality as used in this paper refers to common formal features shared by Chinese and other languages. Particularity covers those characteristics of the Chinese language that have no formal equivalents in other languages. In its strict sense, it means a certain feature which is not found at all in other languages, like the use of *ba* in Chinese to front the object, which has no formal matching in English (Chu, 1982). In most cases, it is used in its wider sense to indicate a disparity in any aspect (e.g. frequency of occurrence, different semantic fields) of a certain feature so that there is no exact match among languages.

Elsewhere (Wu, 1993), I made a comparison between Chinese and English in three subsystems of a language, phonology, syntax and semantics, with the conclusion that there are more similarities than language particular features between the two languages, especially when we consider all the features of a language. Here, I will just give one example in each subsystem.

In phonology, even in the categories that are traditionally regarded as the "unique" feature of Chinese, like the retroflex *zh, ch, sh* and the palatals *j, q, x*, the "uniqueness" is partly exaggerated by the spelling convention. The variations of the phoneme /i/ also affect the sound quality of these consonants. If we ignore the spelling, we have little difficulty in recognizing the similarity in phonetics between the s sound in Seattle, and the

x in *xi* (Kreidler, 1986).

In syntax, among the features mentioned frequently by most studies as "different" are the topic-comment structure (Chao, 1968; Gao, 1981; Li and Thompson, 1989) and word order, especially the left-branching issue. As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to find in English sentences starting with "as for" or "concerning". These are actually equivalent to the topic-comment structure in Chinese in many cases. The so-called "left-branching" structure, which can be represented as "Modifier+*de*+modified", or "attributive+head", receives much publicity not because it is so vastly different from English, but because it is the place where students often make mistakes (Li, 1984). After all, English is also left-branching on the phrase level. Consider "the little round wooden table", in which all the modifiers are to the left of the head noun (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973).

In semantics, almost all languages are similar. Take verbs for example, regardless of the names used in various languages, all languages possess only three kinds of verbs: state, process and action verbs. Following the case grammar theory proposed by Cook (Cook, 1989), all languages are the same when it comes to logical structure with its five identifiable categories: Agent, Experiencer, Benefactive, Object, and Locative. In English, the verb "to give" would involve the giver (Agent), the thing being given (Object), and the receiver (Benefactive). In Chinese, the verb *gei* demands the same number of entities. One may argue that the word *gei* in Chinese can also function as a preposition "for" or

"to", therefore it is different from the verb "to give" in English. This, however, is a difference in the usage of *gei* as a word, and not in the logical structure of *gei* when used as a verb, like "give" in English.

By giving priority to universality, I mean more attention should be paid to common features shared by Chinese and other languages. Don't over exaggerate the uniqueness of Chinese. Always start with similar features (prior in time) and then move to the particular ones. The rationale for such a priority can be understood in the following aspects: psychological preparation of students, old-new information theory in learning, and the number of features on each side when the language is taken as a whole.

Psychologically, students are usually scared, with the exception of few brave ones, to learn from the very beginning that this is a totally different language from English. As a matter of fact, some teachers would tell the students "just forget about English". One problem with human being is that we cannot unlearn. To "forget about" the language you have been using all your life is simply impossible. The feeling would be different if they are told that it is basically the same as the language they know, with some particularities here and there. Such "friendly" preparation would help them feel more confident in the process of learning.

From the perspective of the learning process, it is impossible to acquire new information without old information. What is the same or similar is considered as old information while what is different is new information. New things are usually learned by

comparing and contrasting with the old, either consciously or unconsciously. Moreover, analogy is a most powerful way of learning. There is no analogy without what is already known. The characteristics of adult learner is the power of comparing and contrasting, as supposed to child language acquisition, which is characterized by imitation (Alatis, 1990). It is certainly helpful to try to use some of the features and findings from child language acquisition, but one cannot force an adult to learn like a child.

As teachers, we are also concerned what kind of picture we present to the students about anything we teach. If there are more sameness than differences between the two languages, it's fair that the students have that picture. Having a correct frame will be important for the learning process in the long run. Universality is the wood while particularity is the tree. We don't want our students to be so obsessed with each individual tree that they have no general picture of the wood.

Cultural versus linguistic tasks

If we decompose the learning process into separate tasks, we would see the ones early in the process are mainly linguistic and the ones towards the end are basically cultural in nature. At the advanced level, cultural tasks should have priority over linguistic ones.

By giving priority to cultural tasks, I mean more time and efforts should be devoted to cultivate the students sensitivity to the culture in which the target language is used. I also mean the

approximation of the Chinese culture whenever possible. The model described by Pan (Pan, 1993) is a good example along this line. Although it is difficult to make a clear cut line and use it as a starting point for the focus to be shifted from linguistic to cultural tasks, one can always detect the need when students start telling you that they know every word in the sentence but still don't know what it means.

The real difficulty here is to define a cultural task (Hymes, 1972). According to principles in sociolinguistics, all speech events can be divided into two components. What one says during an utterance is basically linguistic in nature, the words, the syllables, the syntactic structures used, etc. When, where, to whom, and how it is said, however, are factors that can be considered as cultural in nature. In other words, the appropriateness of an utterance, as opposed to the utterance itself, is the cultural task that the students have to acquire.

To understand the line between cultural and linguistic tasks, we can also look at the issue in light of language and language use. Linguistic tasks are the knowledge of language, while cultural ones are the knowledge, or the ability to use the language in an appropriate way. Strictly speaking, cultural factors is at work at the very beginning of a language course. Whether *nin* should be used instead of *ni* in *nihao*, which is perhaps one of the first words a student would learn to say, certainly has a lot of cultural considerations.

The shift of focus from linguistic features to cultural ones

is necessitated by the expectation of the interlocutor during a conversation, especially with native speakers of Chinese. It is certainly true that a lot of "foreigner talk", including mispronunciation, slow in response or speech, wrong choice of words, syntactical errors or broken sentences, are tolerated at the beginning stage of acquisition. Any attempt at carrying out the conversation in the target language with its native people is often appreciated. Experience seems to suggest that such a privilege gradually disappears as the students advance in their level of proficiency. By the time they get to the superior level according to the ACTFL guideline (Government scale level 3 and above), the expectation from native interlocutor changes.

Like it or not, you find yourself measured with the same, or similar criteria as those for the native speakers because of the vocabulary you know, the grammatical structures you use, and the fluency you possess when using Chinese. You are then expected to talk appropriately, to be free from cultural misdemeanor, to laugh at a joke which requires the understanding of the cultural background, to pick up hints that have not been said explicitly, to recognize not just the meaning of words, but the connotation these words may carry, or the attitude of the speaker. All these are not taught by the teacher in the classroom. The best place to pick up these non-linguistic cues would be the society in which the language is used. For want of such an environment, a multimedia approach would be the closest scenario that can provide similar input. Specifics will be discussed in the implication section.

Performance versus competence

Performance is defined as the ability to use the language in communication, either oral or written. Competence, in this context, refers to the knowledge of language. Like the distinction between cultural and linguistic tasks, we can also say that performance is linked to language use while competence is linked to language itself. There is of course a close relation between the two. It is difficult to imagine a good performance without competence. It is possible, however, for someone to have a good knowledge of the language and still perform poorly.

Priority of performance, as is advocated in this paper, means providing enough opportunities for the students so that they can develop their ability to use the language for real life situations. There is good reason to narrow the gap between how much you know and how much you can use. Thus the issue of performance should be on the agenda from the very first day of the program and remain so until the very last day of it. It is difficult to say how much time should be given to performance and how much to competence, for the two of them are often inseparable. Running the risk of over simplifying the issue, I would say students should at least be able to use (performance) over sixty percent of the words and structures they know (competence). Experience suggests that such a percentage would call for a lot more time for cultivating the ability to use the language than the time needed to learn about the language.

If priority for the spoken language is due to the nature of language, for universality is based on the psychology of the

students and the principles in learning, for cultural tasks because of the expectation of the interlocutor, priority for performance is called for by the change of time and the objectives of learning a language.

What the change of time has brought us is the development of science, including linguistics. Many discoveries have been made about the process of learning in general, and language learning in particular. To keep up with the developments of science and the increase of our knowledge, we have to make adjustment in our priority in learning. At least, the ability to simply translate from one language into another should not be the only priority (if it has to be the priority!). To teach knowledge about the language (competence) is no longer enough. To cultivate the ability to use language appropriately (performance) naturally becomes the priority of teaching. Such priority is also dictated by the change of the objective in learning a foreign language for many students.

All of a sudden, China is no longer the arch enemy behind the bamboo curtain, but a partner in doing business. Learning Chinese, accordingly, is now far beyond academic research in literature and linguistics. It is for real life situations and for job opportunities in the future. Most of the students who are now taking Chinese would like to be able to use the language to some capacity. Many of them have to pass a proficiency test in speaking. On the personal level, it is often part of a career enhancer for majors that one way or another linked to the Far East, such as business or foreign relations. Most of these students find

it necessary to use the language, and not just know about it. They require more than just comprehension skills so that they can do research, as many of the history or literature majors did in the past. They need the production skills as well, if not more so, so that they can communicate. If being able to communicate with the native speakers of Chinese is the goal, it in inevitable that performance will be on the foreground of learning.

Proficiency versus achievement

To avoid confusion, I should make a distinction between proficiency and performance as used in this paper. In terms of function, proficiency is more evaluational, while performance is factual. In terms of association, it is more closely linked to testing than teaching. When I talk about proficiency, the focus is on the ability of the student. When I talk about performance, however, the focus is on the language use itself. A student with a high level proficiency usually perform in accordance with the proficiency level. A good performance, if not supported by consistent patterns, cannot be regarded as a sure sign of high proficiency.

To be specific, proficiency is defined as the communication skills in the context of testing, with achievement at other end of the continuance. Within this context, several characteristics in a proficiency-oriented testing will be briefly mentioned here (Stansfield, 1989; Clark and Li, 1986). One is lack of direct link between the content of the test and the textbook used for the

course. No matter what textbook is used, or what methodology is employed in teaching, a student doing well in a proficiency test would be one that is able to use language for real life purposes. This leads to the second characteristic, which can be described as the standardization of the test itself. No matter where it is used, it would measure the same ability. Take for example the Chinese Speaking Test developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, it will measure the students ability to speak Chinese regardless of where they learn the language, how they learn it or what textbook they use.

Giving priority to proficiency test is interpreted as making an effort to develop and use it regularly either by itself or supplemented by achievement tests. A better way of describing priority here would be in terms of importance rather than time, since most of the proficiency tests are developed by testing professionals and the teachers actually don't spend much time designing the test. Important is a concrete criteria rather than just a vague term here. At least, it suggests that proficiency tests are used, regardless of whether or not achievement tests are used, for all entry and exit examinations, semester-end or year-end tests.

Important as it is, it should be pointed out that the use of proficiency test does not exclude normal achievement test. After all, it would be good for both the students and the teacher to know how well the vocabulary and grammatical structures taught in the classroom are mastered by the students.

To give priority to proficiency instead of achievement in testing, like the priority in performance instead of competence, is closely linked to the objective of study. It is also necessary if we want to meet the need of reality. Several factors are at work here. Among the important ones are the meaningfulness of the scores from a proficiency test, the practicality in evaluation across the board, either for placement purposes or for others, and the standardization that is indispensable for a national measurement tool. The ACTFL guidelines, the task force for Basic and Intermediate/Advance standards in Chinese (on-going projects), the introduction of Chinese at high schools, and the implementation of Chinese test in SAT II, all of these factors are the driving force behind standardization.

From another perspective, the lack of standard in achievement tests may also be the driving force for proficiency tests. The multitudinous of textbooks used and individualized ways of grading systems often make it impossible to interpret the grades. Teachers are known to be either "tough" (synonym to "mean" to some students) or "easy" in grading. Inflation in grades is also not uncommon. Materials used for the same level in different schools, or even in the same school, are different in content, style, focus, and difficulty level. The objectives in one program often differ from others. Given all of these factors, an "A" in intensive Chinese II actually tells us nothing unless we know all about the program. It won't be surprising if you find some C students from a certain school are actually much better than some A students from other

schools.

III. Implications

Briefly discussed above are the five components of a dynamic priority theory in teaching CFL. For each aspect, there is a priority and at least a reason why the priority is given the way it is. All the important reasons derive from the nature of language, the learner's psychology and the nature of learning, the expectations of the native interlocutor, the objective of study and the change of time.

In this section, I will outline some implications if such a framework is to be fully implemented. An experimental model will also be described. The best way to deal with the implications is perhaps to answer the question: "What exactly does it entail if these principles are to be followed in teaching CFL?" At least, the following aspects will be affected from a global point of view: curriculum design, teaching methodology, material selection and testing procedure.

Curriculum design: If we think of entering students of Chinese as the raw material and the exiting ones as the products, curriculum design would be the process in which these products are "manufactured". The percentage of the qualified products will then depend on how well the curriculum is designed. Obviously, there is a guiding principle, explicit or implicit, behind all curricula.

A traditional curriculum, with the knowledge of the language as the focus, would inevitably place emphasis on knowing the

language. If the present theoretical framework is used as the principle for designing the curriculum, emphasis would then be on language use instead of on language itself. That would mean a considerable amount of time devoted to the spoken form, the relative late introduction of characters, the efforts to approximate the Chinese culture in the classroom, the recognition of the importance of performance and the use of proficiency test regularly, with or without achievement ones.

Methodology: Given the priorities specified in the curriculum, the pedagogical tools used to achieve the aim will invariably reflect the need of the focus. A proficiency-based teaching methodology, therefore, would be the natural candidate. Among the specific issues to be considered in this regards are the creation of a student-centered teaching environment, the degree to which teachers represent the native culture, especially at the advanced level where the introduction of culture element would almost defy any book knowledge of culture (as opposed to the day-to-day cultural influence), various issues related to error correction (what kind of error should be corrected, how, at what stage, etc.), the kind of exercises to use in order to develop communicative skills, and so on.

Material selection: Once the principles and the methodology are decided, the next important element in incorporating the dynamic priority theory would be the choice of materials. Needless to say, the best materials would be one that is designed with such a theory as the guiding principle in the first place.

Unfortunately, textbooks are always far behind the development of linguistic or pedagogical theories. In selecting materials that will fit the priority theory, the most important thing to bear in mind is perhaps the fact that each stage has a different priority. So long as the salient feature of a textbook fits the need of a particular stage, it can be regarded as good text book. That means different textbooks will be used at different stages. All textbooks, as can be expected, will have to be modified to better fit the need of the curriculum.

Given the fact that more than one textbook will be used, the smooth transition of materials becomes critical. It is nothing new to hear teachers complaining that no single textbook is good enough. Quite a few teachers are actually making up their own teaching materials. It will take perhaps a joint efforts by both the teachers and the program coordinators to smooth out any gap that exist between various textbooks used in the course of the whole program. Relevant descriptions in the model presented below will give some suggestions as to which direction this will go.

One good side effect in adopting the dynamic priority theory in teaching CFL is that the type of materials to be used for programs with such an approach will naturally lead to content-based CFL teaching and the use of authentic materials, reflecting the trend in the field of materials development.

Testing procedure: Adopting the priority theory means the use of proficiency test in the course of the program. It does not follow that no achievement tests will be allowed. The use of

proficiency test as a an evaluation tool is to make sure that the communicative ability of the students can be measured. It does mean, however, that the percentage between oral and written exams now used by many programs will have to be changed. The characteristic features of proficiency tests as well as the advantages of using them have been discussed in detail by many (Jiang, 1993; Stansfield, 1989; Clark, 1986; Clifford, 1993). What I'd like to stress here is that these two kinds of tests are complementary and should not necessarily be mutually exclusive.

Certain aspects of this theoretical frame work have been implemented in actual teaching, with or without making a direct link to the dynamic priority theory. Based on the encouraging outcome from Chinese language training programs the writer has been conducting in the past several years, a model is proposed below. This working model for implementing the dynamic priority theory has four major components: time allocation, teaching materials, methodology, and testing procedure.

Time allocation:

(1) A period of considerable length of time (4 to 8 30-hour weeks depending on the length of the whole program) at the beginning of a Chinese program is devoted solely to the spoken form of the language.

(2) Within each week following the initial period, a certain proportion of classroom time (about 10 hours/week) is allocated for aural and oral practice.

Materials:

All textbooks are not used in their totality. They only serve as the basic texts, with lots of modifications by the instructors.

(1) Beginning level: Standard Chinese: A Modular Approach.

(2) Intermediate level: Speaking Chinese About China, which is treated as a content-based textbook.

(3) Advance level: Advanced Chinese: A Topical Approach. This is a set of teaching materials comprises of unedited authentic materials prepared by the teacher. It has three parts: printed materials, which consists of articles from current newspapers, official documents and publications intended for native speakers (such as extract from the China Encyclopedia); electronic materials, which include video tapes (movies, news, TV series) and audio tapes (news broadcast from VOA, Taiwan and Mainland China); and live materials, which is direct communication with authentic cultural and linguistic representatives who are invited to give lectures and discuss with the students.

Methodology:

(1) Whenever possible, common features among languages are stressed and used as the starting point for introducing particular features;

(2) Features unique to Chinese should receive due attention, but not exaggerated to the extent of a distorted picture of the language.

Testing procedure:

(1) Proficiency tests (OPI and reading comprehension) are administered regularly (usually once every 8 weeks) during the

program;

(2) Final grade of the students are based on their performance in real life and not the knowledge of the textbook they have covered.

The encouraging successful rate (100%) of all the programs since 1987 in Diplomatic Language Services, a language school for training U.S. diplomats, utilizing this approach is the evidence for the feasibility of both the theory and the practice. A successful program is defined as one that fulfills expected goal, which in many cases is the level of proficiency set at the beginning. It should be mentioned, however, that DLS has many advantages over government schools such as FSI and DLI (less red tape and restrictions) as well as Chinese programs in colleges and universities (more money). Among the key factors that contribute to the success are (1) highly motivated students; (2) freedom of instructors to design the program and to follow through; (3) intensive program with a single purpose (learning Chinese); (4) for advanced classes, a budget that makes available the needed teaching materials.

Though not many Chinese programs will enjoy such privilege, the principle manifested by the DLS programs are nevertheless applicable (at least to the intermediate level) in the field of teaching CFL.

IV. Conclusion

Obviously, the variety of curricula in teaching CFL in terms

of purposes may defy any theory in pedagogy. The need to treat different stages of the learning process differently also dictates that any priority is relative. No matter how a particular curriculum is designed and how courses are taught, however, not many people will deny the fact that the final goal of learning a language nowadays is to use it one way or another. It is against such an assumption (we learn language in order to use it) that the dynamic priority theory is defined and discussed.

Due to the complex backgrounds of CFL teachers, the variety of textbooks used and the different traditions followed by institutions, it is expected that any attempt to establish a theory will lead to controversy rather than agreement. With the full realization that theories are always criticized because they cannot satisfy every situation, I still propose it in the hope that it will grow amidst the criticism and suggestions that may follow. It is also hoped that, by raising such a theoretical issue, more people will participate in the discussion, or debates, that will eventually lead to better theoretical guidance in the field of teaching CFL.

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